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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR CODEL PRICE'S NOVEMBER 9-10 VISIT  
TO LEBANON

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The U.S. Mission in Beirut welcomes your November 9-10 visit. Your visit is the first by a U.S. Congressional delegation to Lebanon since the June 7 parliamentary elections. Your meetings with President Michel Sleiman, Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri, caretaker PM Fouad Siniora, Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, and members of parliament (MPs) will reinforce the message that the U.S. is committed to supporting Lebanon's state institutions and looks forward to working with the next government of Lebanon.

USAID and its implementing partners are supporting projects that strengthen state institutions, such as the judiciary, and improve transparency in municipal governments. USAID is also preparing to launch a parliamentary research center program for the Lebanese parliament. With regard to economic reform, you should encourage Lebanese parliamentarians to pass a transparent budget that meets the needs of the Lebanese people. Recent security incidents in south Lebanon have raised questions regarding the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1701. Your visit to Lebanon presents an opportunity not only to register U.S. concern but also to highlight the need for the state to exert control over all of Lebanon's territory. End Summary.  
GOVERNMENT FORMATION PENDING  
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¶2. (SBU) Government formation efforts have been ongoing since the June 7 parliamentary elections. Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri continues to engage with the leaders of various parliamentary groups, especially opposition Christian leader Michel Aoun, to come to a consensus about the distribution of cabinet portfolios and the selection of ministers. The 1989 Taif Agreement created a delicately balanced confessional system which dictates the distribution of power-sharing between Christians and Muslims. Within that framework, jockeying by the parliamentary blocs for representation in a national-unity cabinet has contributed to a protracted negotiation process that has also delayed the functioning of parliament.

¶3. (SBU) Lebanon's 128-member parliament officially opened its regular session on October 20, as mandated by the Lebanese constitution. However, election of committees has been delayed and no legislative work will begin until after the cabinet is formed. Lebanese public opinion generally supports the view that parliament committees should not be formed until after the cabinet formation is complete because the chairmanships and committee membership should reflect a cabinet consensus. However, the public and the leaders consistently express a desire for the government to be formed soon.

INSTITUTION-BUILDING, REFORM  
KEY U.S. OBJECTIVES  
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¶4. (SBU) Strengthening Lebanese state institutions has been and continues to be a major U.S. objective. Progress towards

reaching this objective has been achieved by USAID and its implementing partners. One such example, a project to "Strengthen the Independence of the Judiciary and Citizen Access to Justice in Lebanon," aims to develop the capacity and infrastructure of the Judicial Training Institute (JTI), to enhance judicial independence, and to provide a space for training for judges. This program is implemented by the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) and is expected to run through 2010. A separate project, the Municipal Governance Assistance Program, works with 750 of Lebanon's 900 municipalities to build their capacity and transparency. This program, which began in 2004 and is expected to run through 2011, is being implemented by the State University of New York/Center for Legislative Development (SUNY/CLD).

15. (SBU) SUNY's Center for International Development is also preparing to launch a program with the Lebanese parliament to develop a parliamentary resource center. Prior to implementing any activities, a memorandum of understanding with the parliament is required. Speaker Berri is interested in having the program begin as soon as possible and has voiced support for its objectives.

16. (SBU) On the economic front, one of the first agenda items of the new parliament will be to consider passage of the GOL's 2010 budget. USAID is exploring with the finance ministry establishing a program to provide technical assistance to complement existing activities aimed at improving budget transparency. Improved budget transparency would constrain existing patronage mechanisms, slow the growth of Lebanon's debt burden, and allow the central government to be more accountable to its citizens. You should encourage parliamentarians to support reforms that encourage transparent budgeting to serve the interests of the

Lebanese people in support of these efforts.  
IMPLEMENTATION OF UNSCR 1701

17. (SBU) Lebanese leaders express support for full implementation of UNSCR 1701, which calls for the cessation of hostilities between Israel and Lebanon and the disarming of all militias south of the Litani River. However, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) have recently faced several challenges to their respective mandates. A rocket launch from the southern town of Houla into northern Israel on October 27, preceded by other security incidents over the summer, has raised the specter that armed elements in the south are taking advantage of the government impasse to stir tension. Statements issued from the office of caretaker PM Siniora condemned each of the incidents and reiterated Lebanon's continued commitment to UNSCR 1701. Lebanese leaders have praised UNIFIL and its cooperation with the LAF. We continue to highlight the urgent need to bring all arms in Lebanon under the sole authority of the state. We have also highlighted our ongoing train and equip assistance program to strengthen the Lebanese Armed Forces. We have underscored to the GOL that we believe the surest way for Lebanon to set the stage for eventual peace with its neighbors is to complete UNSCR 1701 implementation and demarcate its borders.

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